

SPECIAL EVENTS

*The Faculty of Music,
University of Toronto*

*Concert Hall,
Edward Johnson Building*

PRAGUE QUARTET

*Thursday, February 17th, 1966
8:30 p.m.*

*Bretislav Novotny - First Violin
Karel Pribyl - Second Violin*

*Jaroslav Karlovsky - Viola
Zdenek Konicek - Cello*

Programme

QUARTET IN F MAJOR, OPUS 18, No. 1

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Ludwig van Beethoven

Allegro con brio

Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Allegro

In 1799 Beethoven sent the parts of this Quartet to the theologian and amateur violinist Carl Amenda as "a small remembrance of our friendship." The work is here headed "Quartetto II" confirming that it was the second of the Opus 18 set in order of composition (the D major Quartet, No. 3, was apparently written first). In June, 1800, Beethoven requested Amenda not to lend out the parts of the F major Quartet, "because I have made many changes" in it: "I have only just learnt how to write quartets properly."

This last remark shows (if the evidence of the sketch-books were not enough) the great pains Beethoven took over this work. It contains perhaps more of his own personality than any of its companions in Opus 18. The very list of movement-headings reveals such terms as "brio," "appassionato," "Scherzo," whose use strikingly signifies a deflection from 18th-century aesthetic.

Organization and growth of a few rhythmic and motivic elements are the salient features of the first movement. The main motive — laboriously whittled by Beethoven from initially quite different rhythmic components — dominates and energizes the whole process.

The core of the Quartet is the deeply-felt Adagio, in D minor. Indeed it is almost the core of the whole Opus 18 series, and probably the most profound slow movement Beethoven had produced up to this time. The composer referred someone to the tomb scene in *Romeo and Juliet* as a clue to its mood. Commentators have often compared the piece to the remarkable, solemn slow movement in the same key and similar rhythm which Beethoven wrote for his Piano Sonata, Opus 10, No. 3. Like that earlier movement, it is unusually long, being of full bithematic structure with central development; another point of similarity, as Tovey notes, is the series of measured "rhetorical" pauses just before the reprise (in the Quartet one seldom hears these pauses given their actual, enormously long, time-value).

The *ancien régime* has brief innings in the Scherzo. The pattern is Haydn's. The chromatics added to the main theme on its reappearance are Mozart's. Nevertheless the rhythmic drive and especially the drumming rhythms of the trio-section give more than a hint of the movement's true author. The finale is brilliant, confident, and high-spirited. The development alternates fugato sections with a flowing melody. A striking feature is the way reprise begins, at an unexpected pitch and in the unexpected tone-color of the viola. There is an unusually long coda.

QUARTET No. 1,

after Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* - - - *Leoš Janáček* (1854-1928)

Adagio – Con moto

Con moto

Con moto – Vivace – Andante

Con moto – Adagio – Maestoso

The first of Janáček's two quartets (a third has been lost) was completed in one week in the composer's seventieth year, 1923. It is evidently an adaptation of his piano trio, a work written and performed in 1908-09, but unpublished and now lost. The trio is known to have had connections with Tolstoy's novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and the ms. of the present quartet bears the subtitle "inspired by L. N. Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*." Janáček's affinities for Russian literature are also shown in his symphonic poem *Taras Bulba*, his operas *Katya Kabanova* based on Ostrovsky and *House of the Dead* based on Dostoevsky. He had planned and partly sketched an opera on Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

The novella studies the gradual deterioration of a marriage. The husband, a rake before, vows to reform after marrying a "pure" woman, proceeds to develop insanely jealous tendencies, and in the end murders her when he finds her alone (although innocently) with a violinist, practising Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*. Music – especially the presto that forms the first movement of that particular work – becomes for the man a symbol of the "demonic" power of sexual attraction, and thus forms a strong element in the story.

It is unclear just how deeply Janáček intended to mirror the various elements of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. His method is certainly neither musico-narrative nor programmatic, and there are of course no quotations from Beethoven. Referring to the Quartet in a letter to a friend, the composer said he had in mind to portray "the pitiable woman who is maltreated, beaten and murdered, such as is described by Tolstoy in his story." Curiously, the music seems to avoid conclusions, and in this sense may be thought of as almost impressionistic. Tolstoy has the husband, Pozdnuishev, say towards the end of the story:

Music instantaneously transports me into that mental condition in which he who composed it found himself. I blend my soul with his, and together with him am transported from one mood to another; but why this is so I cannot tell. For instance, he who composed the *Kreutzer Sonata* – Beethoven – he knew why he was in that mood. That mood impelled him to do certain things and therefore that mood meant something for him, but it means nothing for me. And that is why music excites and does not bring to any conclusion.

The quartet medium perhaps suggested itself first of all because of its ease in suggesting conversational moods. This passage of the novella:

In (the rival's) manners there was a factitious external gayety. A way, as you may know, of speaking about everything by means of hints and fragmentary allusions, as if the person with whom he was speaking knew all about it, and could fill out the missing links.

could find reflection anywhere among the wispy, elusive, broken phrases of Janáček's first two movements. One observes also the rubato effects throughout, the ponticello passages of the second movement with their suggestions of tormented personal emotion, and the fantastic shape of the third movement, where melancholic (and perhaps quasi-Slavic) tunes are interrupted with outbursts of passionate rage.

- INTERMISSION -

QUARTET IN E MINOR ("FROM MY LIFE") - - Bedřich Smetana

Allegro vivo appassionato

Allegro moderato à la Polka

Largo sostenuto

Vivace

According to a brief "program" provided by the composer, this Quartet (composed in 1876 when he was fifty-two) is a sort of musical autobiography. The 19th-century tendency to place the artist's self at the centre of the work of art reached its apogee in Strauss' tone poem *Ein Heldenleben*. Smetana, though (in the manner of the age) idealizing both his troubles and his triumphs, at least chooses a relatively modest medium in which to do so.

He tells us the first movement represents his love of music and a certain romantic longing for the unknowable. A foreboding of tragedy intrudes. The second movement recalls the love of dancing, and dance music, which he had as a youth. The third movement is a poem of idyllic contentment found in love and marriage. The finale depicts his sense of mature creative powers, dramatically interrupted by the impact of deafness (symbolized by a long-sustained high-register note of the violin, the high-frequency "ring" constantly present to a deaf person).

Program Notes by John Beckwith